Learning and working: types of combining university studies with employment

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to mark out and describe different types of combining university studies with work among 4th year university students of Yaroslavl and Tatarstan and to analyze their influence on academic achievement. Seven 'study-work' types are defined on the basis of two variables: work schedule and work relatedness to specialty. 1) Full-time work from the 1st-2nd university year not in a specialty field (223 students), 2) Full-time work during senior university years not in a specialty field (264 students); 3) Part-time work / working from time to time not in a specialty field (1101 students); 4) Full-time work from the 1st -2nd university year in a specialty field (114 students), 5) Full-time work during senior university years in a specialty field (127 students); 6) Part-time work / working from time to time in a specialty field (491 students); 7) Only studying and not enrolled in working during university (1023 students). Every type is characterized from the point of view of academic achievement, motivation to study, future plans and some other important variables. One of the main results is that part-time work in a specialty field doesn't have a negative influence on academic achievement and can even be beneficial to the learning process.

Keywords: student employment, study-work types, academic achievement, job relatedness to specialty, motivation to study

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Introduction

In recent papers dedicated to the research of student employment there are accounts of an increasing number of working university students as well as of hours spent on work (Beerkens, Mägi, Lill, 2011; Hall, 2010). Student employment becomes an increasingly widespread phenomenon in Russia as well as in European countries. Reasons for this are complex. On the one hand there is a constant spread of "non-traditional" types of employment (part-time, freelance, work with a flexible schedule etc.), which give students more opportunities to combine studies with work and are convenient for employees in terms of work conditions (labor contract, salary). On the other hand there is a certain decline in quality of higher education, at least in Russia. As diplomas cease to provide signals for employees that the job seekers have competences needed for the role this function moves to work experience. Young people try to start careers earlier in order to accumulate some experience before graduation (Рощин, 2006). Broadening of student "audience" (with young people from working class families as well as with an increasing number of people involved in getting a second higher education) also contributes to the continuing spread of student employment (Beerkens, Mägi, Lill, 2011).

From the institutional perspective it is very important to answer the question as to what the causes and consequences of this phenomenon are in order to correctly assess it. Roughly speaking: an increasing number of working students – is that good or is it bad? In relevant literature we can find two main frameworks for answering this question. The first one pertains to academic achievement and drop-out rates among working students compared to those who don't work **(**Rochford, Connolly, Drennan, 2009*;* Derous, Ryan, 2008**).** It is usually based on the assumption that the time spent on work is taken away from studying therefore work during studies has a negative influence on academic achievement and increases a possibility of dropping out. But research evidence on this topic usually shows that the connection between student employment and academic achievement isn't that straight forward but it is rather mediated by other factors such as job content and other characteristics (physical or intellectual labor, in a specialty field or not, in a university or beyond) or the number of hours spent at the workplace (Beerkens, Mägi, Lill, 2011; McKechnie, Hobbs, Simpson, Anderson, Howieson, Semple, 2010). One more observation concerns the issue of when students are engaged in employment: working during the two first years of studies has more negative effects on academic achievement than working during further years (Beerkens, Mägi, Lill, 2011). The main conclusion is that part-time work may have no negative effects on academic achievement.

The second framework focuses on the influence of student employment on further integration into the labor market (Robert, Saar, 2012; Pemberton, Jewell, Faggian, King, 2012).

In our study we have the opportunity to unite both the aforementioned frameworks in the analysis of types of combining university studies with work as parts of divergent types of educational and career trajectories of students and graduates. We view trajectories in the domains of education and career as aspects of life trajectories rather than as separate paths because it seems difficult to draw a line between them especially in the context of lifelong learning conception (Cooksey, Rindfuss, 2001).

Therefore the objective of our research can be divided into two parts. The most general research question is the following. How are different types of combining studies with work related to the typical educational and professional trajectories of students and graduates? In other words: what are the consequences and outcomes of different types of student employment in terms of further trajectories of students and graduates in the domains of education and career path? It can be answered only with the data from at least two waves of the longitudinal study. The second objective which can also be viewed as the first step for reaching the general objective refers to one of the sharpest topics of the institutional discourse: influence of student employment on academic achievement. So the main purpose of this paper is to define different types of combining university studies with work and to describe them in terms of academic achievement, motivation and some other important variables. We are going to answer the following questions:

What types of combining studies with work can be defined?

How do different types of combining studies with work influence academic achievement?

What job characteristics are most important from the perspective of the influence on academic achievement?

Do students who work during studies profit in terms of academic achievement compared to those who do not work?

Are there any differences in motivation between different types of combining studies with work?

Literature review and research evidence on student employment

Key questions in the research of student employment refer to working students' characteristics and reasons for working during studies (Robert, Saar, 2012). An important tendency is that not only students from low-income families work during studies but also those who don't have financial problems (Рощин, 2006; Beerkens, Magi, Lill, 2011). It reflects the differentiation of motives behind student employment. In Soviet times financial motivation was the most important: students worked mainly to provide the means to live. The workplace distribution system after graduation guaranteed a successful entry into the labor market, so there was no need to accumulate work experience in order to ease the university-work transition. Nowadays

financial motivation continues to play an important role in student employment but at the same time new types of motivation appear. Moreover motives can vary for students with different characteristics. Financial motivation can often be located among students from low-income families. The motives of students who work without considerable financial problems can be more heterogeneous (from the willingness to facilitate the labor market entry to the desire to fill free-time) (Beerkens, Mägi, Lill, 2011)). Other possible motives can be: self-development, practical interest in a specialty, trying out different jobs in order to find something that would fit oneself best and so on.

As was already mentioned in the introduction two general research focuses according to the types of consequences of student employment are defined: influence on academic achievement and influence on labor market entry and further trajectories in educational and career domains. A relatively negative assessment of working during university studies is not the only possible influence. For example, one of the institutional responses to term-time employment in the UK is the creation of university "job-shops" that are aimed at helping students to find part-time jobs (Little, 2002). But at the same time in this paper such responses are presented as problematic because of the negative impact on academic performance.

In some studies student employment is compared to other types of extracurricular activity such as leisure (Derous, Ryan, 2008). It is suggested that time spent on leisure activities has a positive influence on study attitude, well-being and academic achievement (but this relation is non-linear because influence is mediated by the amount of time spent). At the same time a number of hours spent on work has a negative influence on these variables (and that relationship seems to be linear). Negative impact of work on study attitude and well-being was confirmed but there was no such result for academic achievement. In this study attention has been paid not only to a high number of hours spent on extracurricular activities but also to the motivation towards activities and its perceived relevance to study. In this sense working in a specialty field probably would have a less negative impact on student studies than working in other fields because of its perceived relevance towards studies, for example as another source of learning. This hypothesis correlates with the results of our study which will be presented later.

Another focus in research of combining studies with work is made on the influence of student employment on further integration into the labor market (Robert, Saar, 2012; Pemberton, Jewell, Faggian, King, 2012). Robert and Saar (2012) define two types of institutional contexts that influence the school-to-work transition: the occupational labor market (OLM) and the internal labor market (ILM). OLM is characterized by a rather close connection between qualifications gained at university and the requirements of the labor market. In other words: a graduate's qualifications (confirmed by diploma) are considered by employees as sufficient in the

assessment of a job seeker's competence. In ILM, a diploma is not a relevant signal of necessary competences for employees so more attention is paid to work experience. Personal characteristics are more important than special knowledge (Stiwne, Jungert, 2010) which is in the context of "employability" discourse (Moreau, Leathwood, 2006). These characteristics of the labor market can also be seen as an illustration of the concept of "new capitalism" introduced by Sennett (Sennett, 1998) which is characterized by the flexibility in labor market positions, increasing requirements for job seekers' human capital characteristics etc. So work during studies can be considered an indicator of motivation, ambition, discipline, time management skills and other important features. We suggest that this is what is happening in Russia. The quality of higher education decreases, a diploma is no longer a filter screening unsuitable candidates and more and more students start working before graduation in order to accumulate some experience to facilitate an easier entry into labor market after finishing university (Рощин, 2006). By this logic, work during studies is considered an investment to human and social capital and not as an obstacle to studies. In both perspectives questions about quality, content, motivation and the number of working hours are still important. For example, a situation where students sacrifice some of their time in order to get some applied specialty skills which they lack in university is completely different from a situation where students work as waiters in order to pay for their studies. In the first case working in addition to studying can strengthen motivation to study (Hakkinen, 2006).

Data and method

Participants of the study are 4th-year university students from Tatarstan and Yaroslavl. 3462 students took part in the survey (1988 in Tatarstan and 1464 in Yaroslavl). The survey was conducted in the autumn of 2009 as the first wave of longitudinal monitoring research of educational and professional trajectories of students and graduates.

We used mainly "descriptive" methods such as descriptive statistics, cross-tabulation, Z-test, which are necessary for further analysis.

Types of combining work with studies

We used two variables to mark out different types of combining university studies with work: work schedule and work relatedness to specialty. From 3462 respondents 30% didn't work during university studies, 28% worked from time to time, 21% worked part-time, 12% worked full-time on senior years, 10% worked full-time from the 1st-2nd year. Approximately half of

respondents answered a question about the accordance of their work with specialty negatively. Full work-study correspondence was mentioned by 14% of respondents.

Seven study-work types are defined on the basis of two variables: work schedule and work relatedness to specialty.

Table 1 Study-work types

Study-work types	Number of students	Percentage
Full-time work from the 1st-2nd university year not in a specialty field	223	6,7%
Full-time work during senior university years not in a specialty field	264	7,9%
Part-time work / working from time to time not in a specialty field	1101	32,9%
Full-time work from the 1st -2nd university year in a specialty field	114	3,4%
Full-time work during senior university years in a specialty field	127	3,8%
Part-time work / working from time to time in a specialty field	491	14,7%
Only studying, not enrolled in working during university	1023	30,6%
Total	3343	100,0%

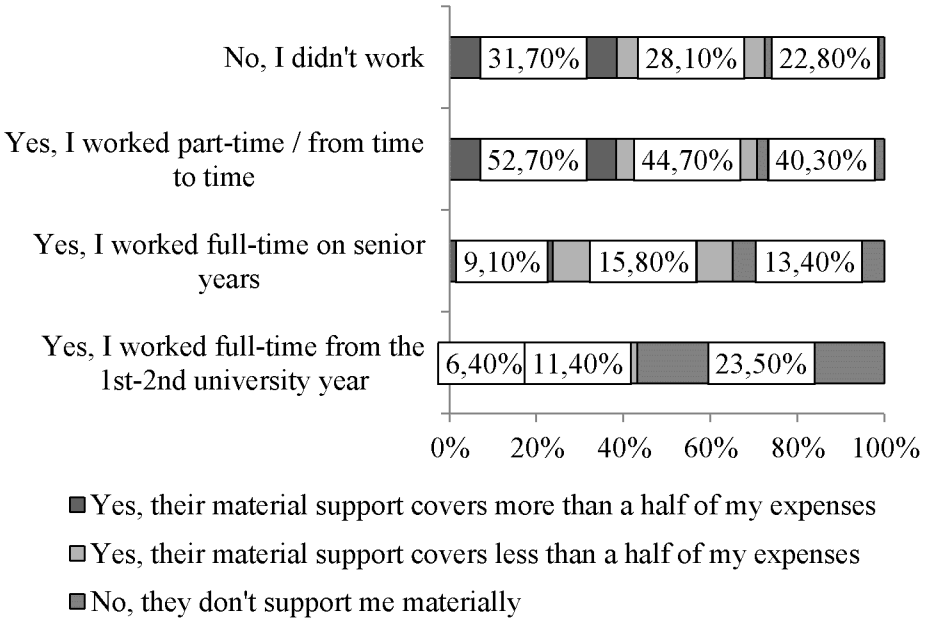
We assume that every type can be identified from the point of view of motivation, influence on academic achievement and further development of life trajectories in educational and career domains.

Material factors

Although there is a tendency towards differentiation of motives for working during studies, material factors still have a large influence on work schedule.

Parents' material help has an influence on work during studies. Among students who don't receive any material support from their parents there is a significantly higher percentage of those working full-time from the 1st-2nd university year (23,5%). Among those whose parents cover less than a half of their expenses only 11,4% work full-time from the 1st-2nd university year, and among those who have over half of their expenses subsidized – 6,4%. Among students who aren't materially supported by their parents there is the smallest percentage of those who never worked during studies (22,8% in comparison with 29,7% in total).

Figure 1 Work during studies depending on parents' material support



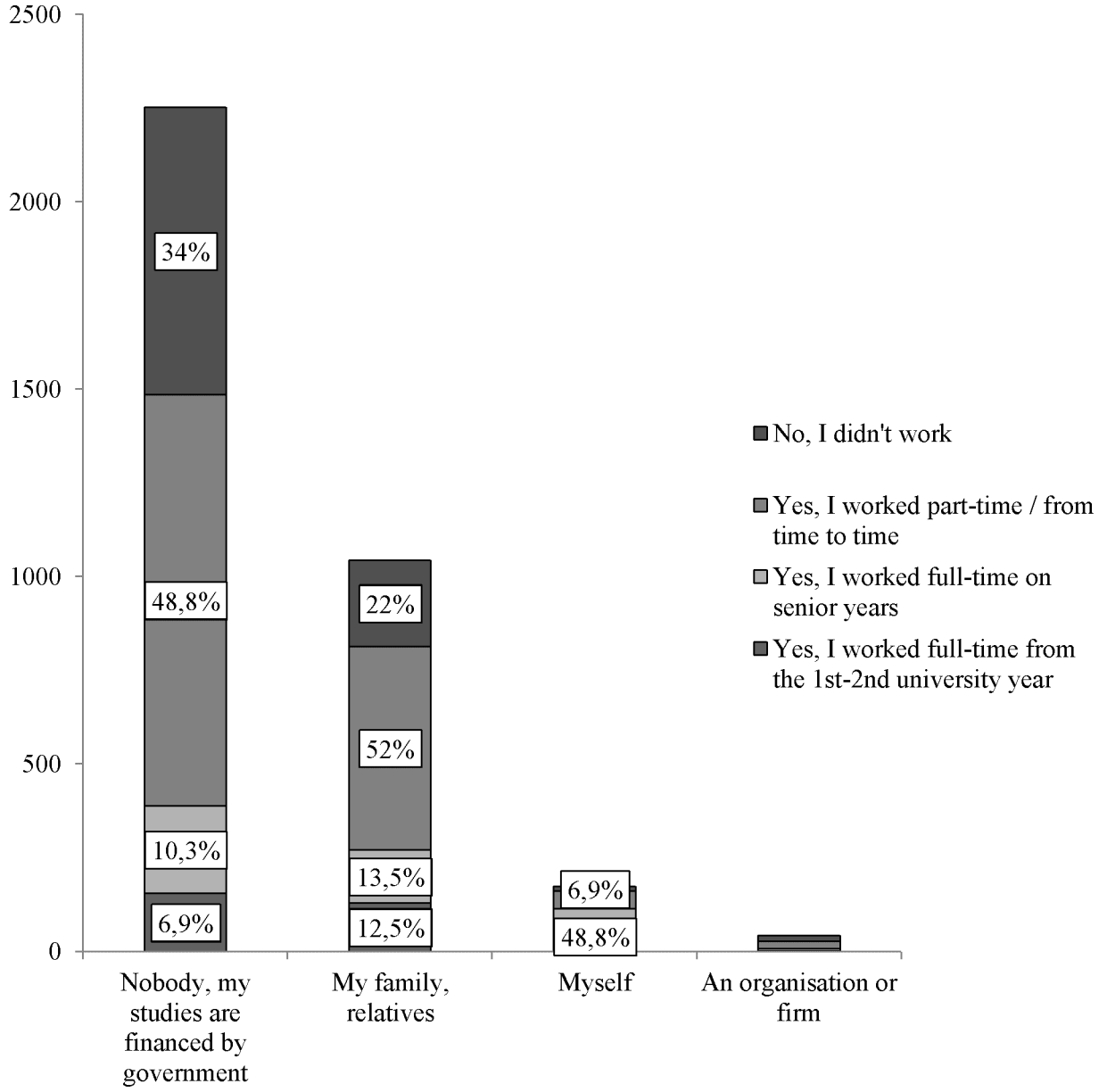
Most of the respondents – 65,4% – have their studies financed by the government, 34,6% pay for them by themselves or with the help of other people or organizations. And only 5% of those whose studies aren't financed by the government pay for them only by themselves, without any help. The rest are supported by family or relatives.

Table 2 Who pays for your studies?

Who pays for your studies?	Number	Percentage
Nobody, my studies are financed by the government	2256	64,10%
My family, relatives	1046	29,70%
Myself	173	4,90%
An organisation or firm	42	1,20%
Total	3517	100,00%

Almost half of those who pay for their studies only by themselves worked full-time from the 1st-2nd year. Only 6,9% of them didn't work at all. Students whose studies are financed by the government or by relatives in general work part-time or from time to time (48,8% and 52%).

Figure 3 Who pays for your studies? / Did you work while studying?

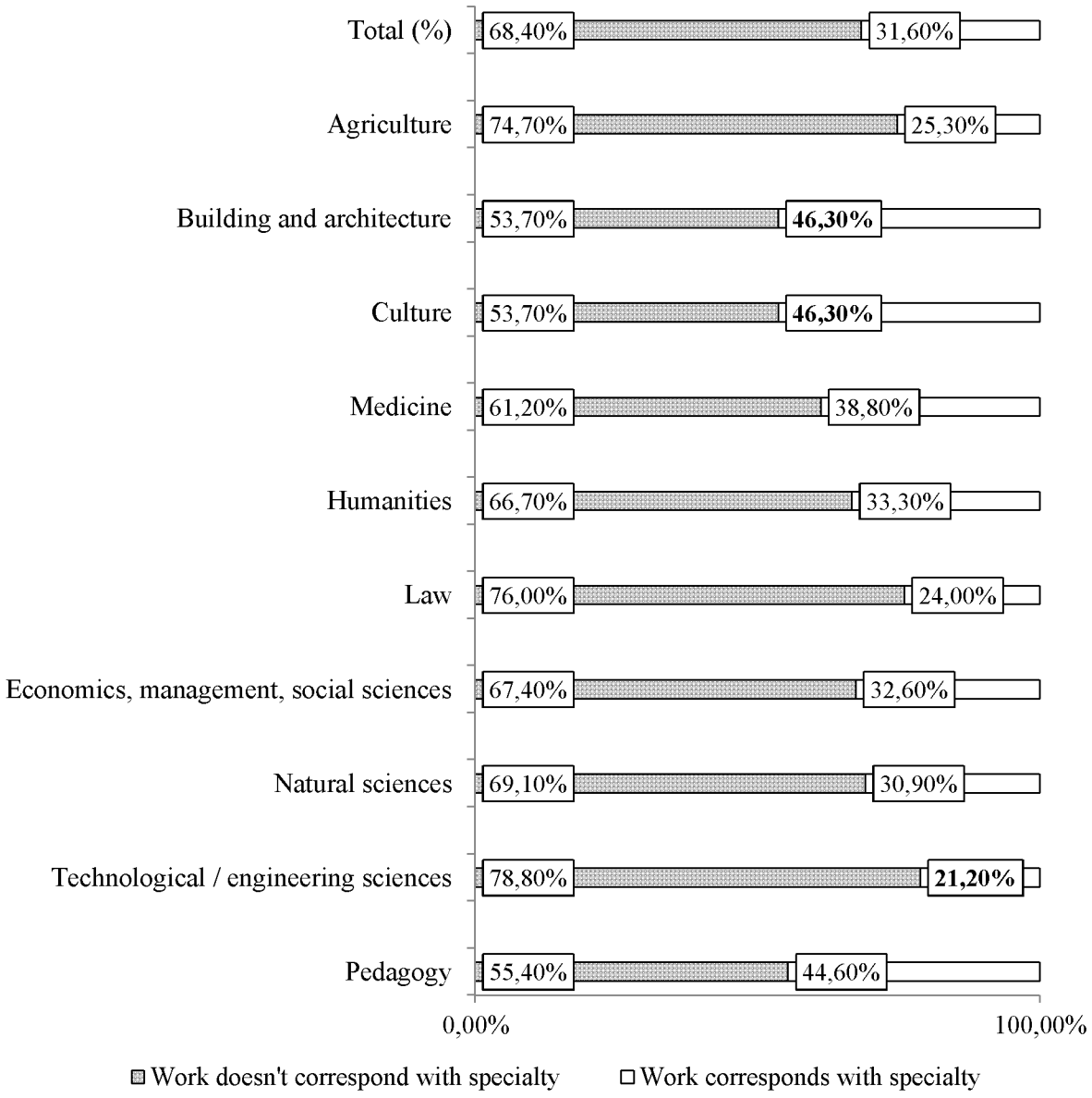


Work relatedness to specialty

68,5% of respondents don't work in a specialty field while 31,5% work in a specialty field. These figures can be compared with the results of research conducted by Vosnesenskaya, Konstantinovsky and Cherednichenko (Вознесенская, Константиновский, Чередниченко, 2000), where 55,7% don't work in a specialty field and 44,3% in a specialty field. As we can see the number of students working in a specialty field is also less than half but the disparity between the two groups is not highly significant. Partly such a bias towards not working in a specialty

field can be explained by the difficulties of finding a role corresponding to a specialty job during studies without enough knowledge and experience.

Figure 2 Work relatedness to specialty depending on the group of specialties



Work relatedness to specialty varies depending on specialty. The biggest disproportion in the number of those who work in a specialty field and not in accordance with it is among technological / engineering sciences students: only 21,2% worked according to their specialty. This result is quite surprising as we expected that students of technological / engineering departments usually work in the field of information technology. Possibly there is a methodological problem and the question about job relatedness to specialty works differently for different groups of specialties. There a lot of technological / engineering departments which names are very narrow and specific that can be a possible reason of estimating one's work as not corresponding or rather not corresponding. Unfortunately we can't verify this hypothesis with

the data we have because it doesn't contain sufficient information about specific fields in which students work. At the same time technological / engineering sciences include such specialties as mechanical engineering, aviation, petrochemistry and so on. In these fields there are fewer opportunities to find a part-time job or a job with flexible schedule, which are the most widespread forms of student employment. The percentage of those whose work corresponds to their specialty is the biggest for culture and architecture students (46,3%). One possible explanation is that a group of specialties united under the word "culture" includes a wide spectrum of domains, which can correspond to a large scope of different jobs. Probably these students also have more opportunities to work in a specialty field even during the 1st-2nd year of studies. At the same time significantly more students of "culture" departments had some education level (beyond comprehensive school) before entering university (for example some kind of vocational education or unfinished higher education): 25,4% in comparison with 8,8% in total. It increases their chances of finding a corresponding specialty job. Concerning building and architecture departments, 13,5% of the students have their studies financed by an organization or a firm. This percentage is significantly higher for this group of specialties compared with other departments. The next value is 1,9% for natural sciences students.

It seems logical that there is a correlation between the remoteness of having made a decision to enter a particular department and work relatedness to specialty. Those who work in a specialty field used to make their decision to enter a particular department earlier than those who don't work in a specialty field. The percentage of students who chose a specialty one month or less before entering university is significantly higher among those who don't work according to specialty (34,3%) in comparison with those who work according to it (24,2%). Among students working according to a specialty, there are more students who chose specialty one year before (22,4%) and more than two years before entering university (16%) in comparison with those who don't work in a specialty field: 17,2% - the decision was made one year before entering university, 10,1% - more than two years before entering university, and in comparison with percentages among all the students: 18,9% - one year before, 11,9% - more than two years before entering university).

Also there is a correlation between working according to specialty during studies and willingness to work according to specialty when entering university. 74,1% of students whose job corresponds to studies wanted to work according to their specialty when entering university in comparison with 58,3% of those who don't work according to specialty. At the same time percentage of students who wanted to work according to a specialty when entering university is higher than those who didn't want to or who didn't care.

Among students working in a specialty field there is a significantly higher percentage of those who were able to describe in detail their future job when entering university (41,1%) in comparison with 27% of students who don't work in a specialty field and also compared to the whole sample.

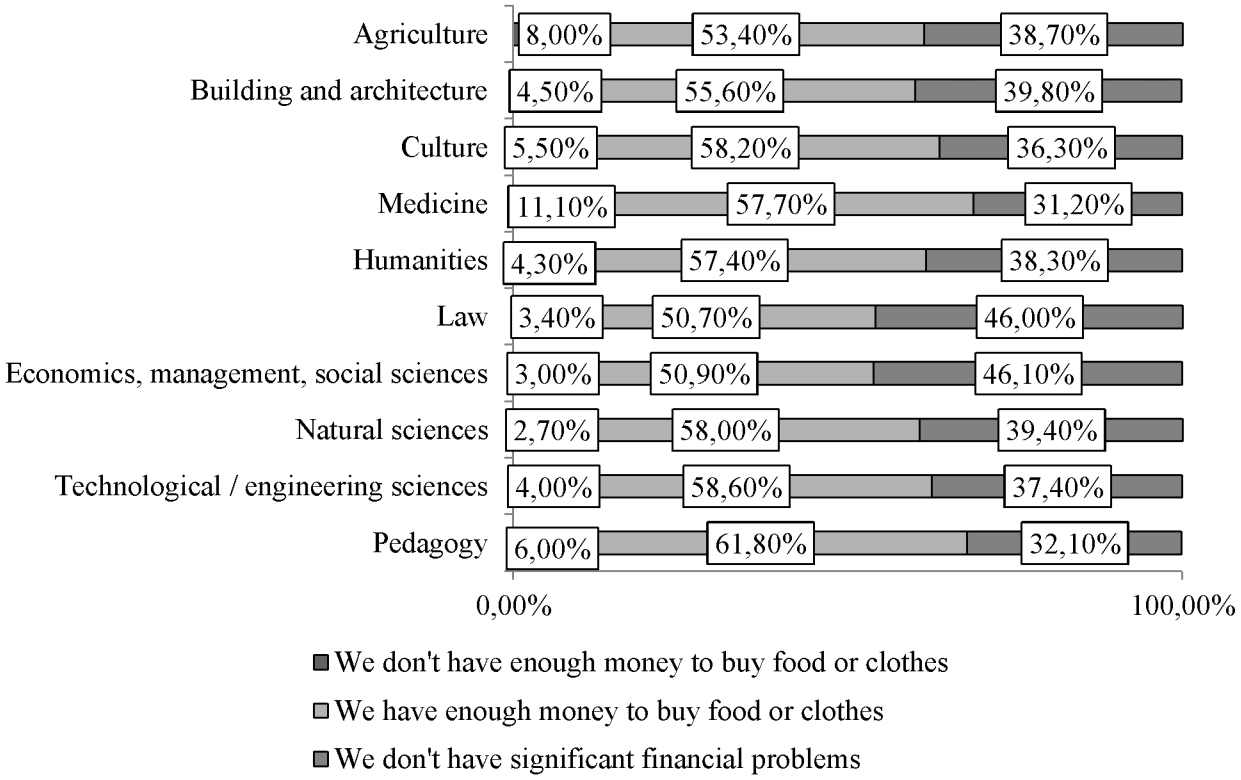
Table 4 Work during studies depending on specialty

Did you work during studies?	Yes, I worked full-time from the 1st-2nd university year	Yes, I worked full-time in senior years	Yes, I worked part-time / from time to time	No, I didn't work	Total (N)
Pedagogy	8,40%	9,10%	56,00%	26,40%	416
Technological / engineering sciences	10,10%	15,60%	49,20%	25,10%	844
Natural sciences	**3,80%**	16,30%	60,30%	19,60%	209
Economics, management, social sciences	12,20%	7,80%	**36,20%**	**43,80%**	1055
Law	9,70%	9,10%	56,60%	24,60%	175
Humanities	8,50%	18,40%	57,70%	15,40%	272
Medicine	8,80%	8,00%	54,90%	28,30%	226
Culture	15,30%	15,30%	61,00%	**8,50%**	59
Building and architecture	7,30%	11,50%	58,30%	22,90%	96
Agriculture	16,50%	10,70%	51,50%	21,40%	103
	10,10%	11,60%	48,70%	29,60%	100,0%
Total (N)	350	401	1681	1023	3455

The types of work schedule are significantly different for different specialties. The biggest percentage of those who never worked during studies is among the students of economics, management and social sciences (43,8%). Possibly it could be explained by the material resources of their families. There is the biggest percentage of families from the two wealthiest categories: "we can buy everything except such expensive things as a car, a cottage or a flat" and "we don't have any material problems, if we want we could buy an expensive car, a country

house or a flat" (if compare with other specialties). To make make the analysis more lucid we cut the amount of gradations of material resources from six to three (Figure 4). At the same time it is the biggest group that collects very different kinds of students. We assume that there is a tendency for Russian school graduates to enter economics and management departments in case if they don't know what they want to do in the future. It can partly reflect a phenomenon of "choice moratorium" when young people in fact don't make any choice after finishing school but just follow some external conceptions about what they should do. In that case this group of specialties covers a great number of students with different types of motivation, skills and knowledge.

Figure 3 Family material resources within different specialties



The smallest percentage of those who didn't work during studies is among the students of culture specialties (8,5%). The smallest part of students who worked full-time from the 1st-2nd year is among natural sciences students (3,8%).

Educational and career plans

There is a certain connection between students' educational and professional plans («What are you planning to do after finishing university? a) to work, b) to work and continue studying, c) to continue studying (not going to work), d) something else _____, e) haven't decided yet)

and work relatedness to specialty. Significantly fewer students among those who don't work according to a specialty are planning to combine work with studies in the future (32,1% in comparison with 41% of those who work in a specialty field). Most students in both groups are planning only to work after graduating although among students whose work doesn't correspond to specialty the percentage of those planning only to work is slightly bigger (63,3% in comparison with 54,1% in the group of students working according to specialty). There is a very small number of students who are planning only to continue studies (without working) in both groups (0,9% in the group of students working not in accordance to specialty and 1,3% in the group of those working according to specialty).

Among alternative answers regarding plans for the time after graduating from university, the most popular are the army (for men) and child upbringing (for women). Also mentioned were such answers as business and emigration abroad.

Work during studies and academic achievement

Table 5 ***Types of combining work with studies and academic achievement***

Types of combining work with studies	I have excellent grades for most of the subjects	I study well and almost never fail exams	I study satisfactorily but have sometimes failed exams	Total (N)
Full-time work from the 1st-2nd year not in a specialty field	25,3%	49,3%	25,3%	221
Full-time work in senior years not in a specialty field	24,2%	53%	22,7%	264
Part-time work / working from time to time not in a specialty field	33,2%	51,9%	14,9%	1096
Full-time work from the 1st - 2nd year in a specialty field	39,8%	43,4%	16,8%	113
Full-time work on senior years in a specialty field	42,9%	39,7	17,5%	126

Part-time work / working from time to time in a specialty field	**45,6%**	44,6%	9,8%	491
Only studying, not enrolled in working during university	43,1%	47,4%	**9,6%**	1022
Total (%)	37,4%	48,6%	13%	100%
Total (N)	1247	1620	466	3333

Quite a strong correlation can be noticed between types of the study-work combination (which is a sum of two variables: work schedule and work relatedness to specialty) and academic achievement. The question of influence of work during studies on academic achievement is one of the most pertinent from an institutional perspective. Our data includes not only the type of employment (part-time or full-time) but also such parameters as its localization in time (primary or senior university years) and work relatedness to specialty.

Several general findings can be mentioned. At first the influence of work relatedness to specialty on academic achievement is significantly higher than influence of work schedule. The greatest percentage of high achievers is among those students who work part-time in a specialty field (45,6%). The percentage of high achievers among not working students is almost the same (43,1%). The percentage of high achievers is significantly less among the students working full-time not in a specialty field (on primary or senior courses) – about 24-25%. The distribution of satisfactory grades can be seen as a mirror reflection of the distribution of high grades. The percentage of students that have satisfactory grades is the highest among those who work full-time from primary university years not in a specialty field. This percentage decreases for those who work full-time on senior years and those who work part-time and not in a specialty field.

One of the most important results is that academic achievement of not working students is the comparable to academic achievement of those who work according to specialty. In the group of not working students there are more high achievers (by percentage ratio) than in the whole sample and in the group of students who don't work in a specialty field (not depending on work schedule and work start time: on primary or senior courses). Between the groups of non-working students and students working according to specialty there are no significant differences in academic results. In this connection we can assume that *work relatedness to specialty is a key factor that determines the influence of student employment on academic achievement.* Our data fit with the model according to which, working in one's specialty field is another source of learning alongside the university curriculum. Moreover we can suggest that students working in

specialty fields might have a stronger motivation to learning. But at the same time the amount of working hours is still an important factor. Full-time employment significantly reduces students' opportunities to attend lectures and seminars at university and doing homework. That's why an optimal strategy of combining studies with work can be considered part-time employment in a specialty field. Students who work full-time in a specialty field have more satisfactory grades than non-working students or students employed part-time in a specialty field or not although less so than those who work full-time and not in a specialty field.

Academic achievement and "Grit scale"

An additional topic which seems interesting for the analysis of students' academic achievement concerns the influence of motivational indicators (namely a "grit scale") on academic results. A "grit scale" measures an individual's ability to continue trying to reach certain goals even after failed attempts. In our survey it consists of 15 statements. For example: "New ideas and projects sometimes distract me from previous ones". Answers were recoded in such a way that grit could take low, middle and high values.

We expected that "grit" positively correlates to academic achievement. Grit is normally distributed, therefore, most of the respondents have average measures of grit. But on the poles of the distribution there is a certain correlation between grit and academic achievement. If we compare low and high measures of grit in groups of students with different grades we see that among high achievers there are fewer students with low grit measures (11,5%) than with higher ones (16,1%). From high achievers to satisfactory achievers percentage of those who have low grit measures increases (11,5% -> 14,1% -> 15,6%), and with high measures – decreases (16,1% -> 10,2% -> 9%).

Motives for entering a particular university and a particular department

We analyzed whether there is a connection between types of combining studies with work and students' motives for entering a chosen university and specialty. In general the distribution of motives is quite homogeneous although there are some differences between some groups. The most popular motive for all groups is the prestige of the diploma (27,8%). Non-working students chose this variant significantly more often than others. Those who work full-time not in a specialty field more often than non-working students chose as motives the ease of entering university and having necessary social ties. The motive of course cost was more significant for those who work full-time and not in a specialty field from the first or second university years

than for those who don't work at all, work part-time of full-time on senior courses and in a specialty field. A strong faculty staff is more significant for students working part-time in a specialty field than for those working full-time or part-time not in a specialty field. The desire to study together with friends is more important for students working part- or full-time not in a specialty field than for those who work part-time in a specialty field or don't work at all. A chance to establish new contacts is more significant for students who work part-time in a specialty field than for those who work full-time from the first or second years and not in a specialty field. The least popular motive for all the groups is a safe environment (3,5%).

For students not working in a specialty field (part-time or full-time) such a motive as the ease of learning has more significance than for those who don't work or work part-time in a specialty field. Students who work full-time in senior years in a specialty field more often than students who work with the same schedule but not in a specialty field mentioned a motive of high social standing of the job, which can be found after finishing a chosen specialty. It is rather interesting that the motive of getting a job with a high salary was very popular for non-working students compared to those who work full-time in senior years not in a specialty field and to those who work part-time no matter whether within or outside a specialty field.

The main result of the analysis is that the motives for entering a university and specialty correlate to work relatedness to specialty. The motives of the students working in a specialty field concentrate around the characteristics of the study process and a chosen specialty. For example, a strong faculty staff, high social recognition of a job and so on. For students who don't work in a specialty field such motives as ease of entering a university and studying, affordable course price and the desire to study together with friends. Such motives are not directly connected to a particular specialty but rather reflect good conditions of entering the specialty or studying it. At the same time such a motive as a strong faculty staff is more popular among students working in a specialty field compared as to those not working in a specialty field as to non-working students. Non-working students also mentioned, slightly more often, that their specialty choice corresponded to their parents' desire although the difference is not significant.

Discussion and conclusions

We defined six types of combining studies with work depending on work schedule and work relatedness to specialty including non-working students. Students with different types of combining studies with work have different academic results and the motives of entering a university and choosing a specialty. Material factors play an important role in making a decision about working while studing: students who aren't materially supported by their parents start

working earlier than others. Different strategies of combining work with studies are reflected in academic achievement. And the most important aspect of type of student employment is work relatedness to specialty: other things being equal, students who work in a specialty field study better than those who work in other fields or sometimes even better than those who don't work at all. It can be true for part-time employed students in a specialty field. In such cases, part-time work according to a specialty can be considered one more important source of knowledge, skills and motivation to study. In other words: it can be assumed that in certain conditions (with work schedule and the number of working hours being the most important) work in a specialty field while studying can have a positive influence on academic achievement and the learning process. How it influences further trajectories in educational and career domains is the next question.

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